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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Human Rights Law Centre, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Australia violating the rights of asylum seekers

The Human Rights Law Centre is deeply concerned about Australia's unlawful and increasingly punitive treatment of asylum seekers arriving by boat.

In addition to mistreating those who arrive, Australia is now actively preventing others from coming.

The Australian Navy is intercepting boats on the high seas and towing them back towards Indonesia, which is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention.

Australia has also gifted patrol boats to the Sri Lankan Government to help it stop asylum seekers from leaving, despite widespread reports of ongoing human rights abuses in that country.

Australia has published advertisements in refugee producing countries, warning would-be refugees of the harsh treatment they'll receive should they come and seek Australia's protection.

The Australian Government has also officially ceased granting protection visas to maritime arrivals and announced that no person coming by boat will ever receive permanent protection in Australia.

All maritime arrivals continue to be subject to mandatory detention on Nauru or Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, in conditions the UNHCR has assessed as falling short of international human rights standards. The camps currently hold over 2000 asylum seekers, but very few protection claims have actually been processed and arrangements are not yet in place for the resettlement of those found to be refugees.

By seeking to prevent asylum seekers from arriving and outsourcing its obligations in respect of those that do, Australia is setting an alarming global precedent that must be condemned.

We call on the Human Rights Council and member States to remind Australia that refugee protection is a global challenge. Australia needs to share, not shift, responsibility for that challenge and must comply with the letter and spirit of its international obligations in doing so.